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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **NJPCSA Celebrates School Library Month with an Urgent Call to Fund New Jersey's Public Charter School Facilities**

### **School Library Month Highlights Facilities Funding Inequities for Public Charter Schools**

Hamilton, New Jersey - April 22, 2024 - The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) celebrates April's School Library Month and the tremendous contribution school libraries make towards fostering literacy and creating a lifetime love of learning. With the observation of School Library month, NJPCSA calls on Governor Murphy and the Legislature to provide public charter schools with crucial school facilities funding so that every public school can provide their students with a dedicated library.

In Governor Murphy's FY2025 proposed budget, emergent projects and capital maintenance aid for public charter schools was reduced by \$15 million dollars and the recently created Public Charter and Renaissance School Facilities Loan Program has gone unfunded.

"Libraries are cornerstone institutions in schools, playing a vital role in promoting literacy, fostering critical thinking, and providing modern technological tools and resources. Yet despite their proven impact, public charter schools across New Jersey operate without dedicated facilities funding for providing library space, denying students these resources," **said Harry Lee, President and CEO of NJPCSA.**

Nearly 89% of public charter schools say their schools do not have libraries or that their school libraries are not adequate, highlighting a gap in resources that impedes student access to essential educational tools. Additionally, public charter schools are forced to fund their facilities from operating budgets, spending on average \$2,000 per student, funding that would otherwise be used for teacher salaries, classroom supplies, and technology.

In contrast, since 2001, New Jersey has invested over \$18 billion in school construction across Schools Development Authority (SDA) districts, regular operating districts (RODs), and vocational schools to enhance infrastructure and resources, including libraries.

"The lack of adequate facilities funding for essential resources like libraries, gyms, and technology labs is an inequity that public charter schools continue to face," **stated TJ Best, Senior Advisor at NJPCSA.** "Bridging this divide is crucial to ensure that all students, regardless of the type of public school they attend, have equal opportunities to access vital resources and flourish both academically and personally."

The absence of libraries and facilities funding is particularly felt in under-resourced communities and among students of color, who make up 91% of those attending public charter and renaissance schools in New Jersey's most challenged districts. With 76% of these students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, the lack of financial resources within schools exacerbates educational inequities.

"In Newark, our students face numerous challenges outside the school doors. Inside, they should find a sanctuary of learning equipped with the tools they need to thrive, and libraries are essential resources in schools," **said María Pilar Paradiso, Head of School at Link Community Charter School in Newark.** "With the addition of our elementary school, the need for dedicated library space becomes even more critical, particularly given the role of early literacy in setting the foundation for lifelong learning. Providing a space specifically for our youngest students sends a message about the importance of literacy and fosters a love of reading from the moment a child first enters school."

**Lee concluded,** "We greatly appreciate Governor Murphy and the Legislature's efforts to address public charter schools facilities, including the creation of the facilities loan program. However, now is not the time to take our foot off the gas. We need to fund the loan program and restore funding for emergent aid. We look forward to working with elected officials over the spring to ensure the final state budget affords every student access to a safe, healthy and modern school building."

For more information about New Jersey's public charter schools, please visit [www.njcharters.org](http://www.njcharters.org).

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### **About Public Charter Schools**

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools run by non-profit organizations open to all students regardless of zip code, race/ethnicity or ability level. Charter schools operate with more flexibility than traditional public schools in exchange for increased accountability and high financial, academic and managerial standards by an authorizer. A "charter" is a contract with an authorizer detailing the school's mission, program, performance goals and methods of assessments. In New Jersey, the New Jersey



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Department of Education serves as the sole authorizer and oversees all public charter schools in the state.

**About the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association**

The New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (NJPCSA) is the non-profit membership association that represents the state's public charter school community and, by extension, charter school students and their parents. There are currently 85 public charter schools in New Jersey serving more than 62,000 students. We are committed to advancing quality public education for New Jersey's children through the cultivation of excellent public charter schools. The Association seeks to influence legislative and policy environments, leverage collective advocacy, and provide resources to support our members in developing and operating high-quality, public charter schools.